

Toronto Fire Services Career Pathways for Toronto Community Housing Residents

Date: June 19 2024

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Fire Chief and General Manager, Toronto Fire Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to direction from City Council to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee on steps that could be taken to ensure Toronto Community Housing tenants have access to a career in firefighting.

Toronto Fire Services (TFS) has five entry level positions that are recruited with external applicants, including Operations Firefighter, each of which require specialized qualifications. Currently, TFS hires approximately 208 Operations Firefighters annually.

In the last few years, TFS has made several changes to remove barriers for applicants, by adjusting requirements including removing expiry dates from certain stages of the Candidate Testing Service (CTS) process. Changes have also been made to the screening process, and interview process with a special program that ensures all qualified Toronto residents and/or members of equity deserving groups are invited to an interview.

In partnership with Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), TFS has also enhanced opportunities to build tenant awareness about pathways to a career in the fire service. This includes dedicated outreach activities, attending TCHC job fairs, and the implementation of a new "Day in the Life" event for TCHC youth in their Youthworx program.

Finally, in consultation with TFS, TCHC is developing a new career readiness program, that will provide approximately 90 interested TCHC tenants with wrap-around and capacity-building supports to enter the workforce. Twenty tenants will also receive partial funding to obtain pre-qualifications to support their pursuit of meaningful work as a TFS Operations firefighter. This program will operate within the TCHC Community Economic Development Team that works to create and facilitate economic opportunities for tenants.

This program, intended to commence in 2025, is contingent on a request in the TCHC operating budget through the 2025 budget process.

Building on enhanced outreach activities and the new career readiness program, TFS and TCHC will continue collaborating closely to support qualified TCHC tenants to secure careers in the fire service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fire Chief and General Manager, Toronto Fire Services recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Although the service expansion details are not known at this time, it is anticipated that a new funding request will be included in the 2025 Operating Budget Submission for Toronto Community Housing Corporation, to accommodate the expansion of the existing employment-support program. Currently, the expanded programming is not anticipated to have additional budget impact for Toronto Fire Services.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 13-15 2023, City Council adopted item EC8.8 directing the Deputy City Manager- Community and Social Services to report to Economic and Community Development Committee in the second quarter of 2024 with steps that can be taken to ensure that Toronto Community Housing Corporation tenants have access to a career in fire fighting, including assistance and potential scholarships for accreditation, and other requirements to become successful members of Toronto Fire Services.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.EC8.8>

COMMENTS

At its meeting on December 13-15 2023, City Council requested staff to report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee, in the second quarter of 2024, on steps that could be taken to support Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) tenants with obtaining the certification and trainings required for a career in fire fighting at Toronto Fire Services (TFS).

In response, TFS and TCHC staff have collaborated on the development of a new program, designed to further assist TCHC tenants in securing a career in the fire service. TFS has also taken steps to change its internal processes and has increased outreach in collaboration with TCHC.

TFS Careers

Toronto Fire Services is the City of Toronto's all hazards emergency response organization, providing fire protection services that align with the three lines of defence outlined in the Fire Protection and Prevention Act. The three lines of defence are education, enforcement, and emergency response, which are provided to all of Toronto's residents, businesses, and visitors. To support the delivery of these services, TFS has an approved complement of 3,327 full time employees.

There are five main career entry points within TFS, including Operations Firefighter, Call-taker/ Dispatcher, Inspector, Heavy Truck Mechanic, and Public Educator. Each of these positions fall within the scope of the Toronto Professional Fire Fighters Association, Local 3888, collective agreement.

Many of these positions require mandatory qualifications, in accordance with Provincial Regulations, which must be met prior to applying and are detailed in Attachment 1. These include certifications such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1035 - Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications; and NFPA 1001 - Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications, as well as professional designations such as Mechanic licenses, Heavy truck driver's licenses and CPR qualifications.

In recent years, TFS has hired 150-208 Operations Firefighters annually, to keep up with attrition, and to facilitate the addition of 52 net new positions approved through the budget processes in both 2023 and 2024. The entry-level positions outside the Operations Division are less frequently hired, as they operate in smaller numbers.

Job Qualifications for Operations Firefighters

There are four mandatory job qualifications for the position of Operations Firefighter. There are a wide variety of ways for a candidate to achieve the mandatory qualifications. Many publicly funded and Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) eligible, post secondary institutions in Toronto offer the NFPA 1001 foundation course, as well as private career colleges that offer compressed versions.

Table 1: Approximate costs for pre-requisites for Operations Firefighter

	Approximate Costs
NFPA 1001 levels 1 and 2	\$9,000-16,000
CPR Basic Life Safety	\$100-200
Ontario Driver's license - Class DZ Classification	\$1,000-2,500

	Approximate Costs
Candidate Testing Services	\$688
Total	\$11,000- \$19,500

Changes Led by Toronto Fire Services

TFS has examined opportunities to modify internal processes to support potential TCHC applicants, leading to changes that will be implemented beginning in the third quarter hiring cycle of 2024. TFS previously required current and valid Candidate Testing Service (CTS) Stage One, Two and Three Certifications, and Swim Test. CTS certifications include aptitude, hearing, vision, a job-specific fitness assessment, and firefighter technical skills such as hauling ladders, and working in full bunker gear. All certifications have an expiry date, established by CTS, upon which they require renewal by retaking the test.

The CTS process is administered by Ontario Fire Administration Inc., on behalf of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs.

TFS has removed the expiry date pre-requisite for Stage One certification, parts of Stage Three certifications, and has removed the requirement for the successful completion of the swim test. These revisions to requirements will further remove barriers and costs for potential applicants. Stage One is the aptitude and character test, which TFS recommends all prospective applicants complete before committing to any NFPA 1001 formal training or education.

By removing these expiry date pre-requisites, TFS is supporting those interested in firefighting to start with an aptitude test to confirm this is a path they want to pursue and giving them an indication if they would be successful, before spending further money on schooling. TFS is removing the expiry date pre-requisite for the technical skills assessment in Stage Three, as TFS will cover the assessments as part of the training once hired. Finally, the swim test has been removed as a pre-requisite and the ability to swim (as verified through the completion of the CTS Swim Test, Bronze Medallion, or other, etc.) will be considered an asset. These skills will be added to the TFS Recruit Training Program rather than being maintained as a pre-requisite qualification.

Toronto Fire Services' Recruitment Process

The TFS Operations Firefighter recruitment process has evolved substantially over the last 10 years, including significant changes being made in 2016, following a comprehensive recruitment process review that formed part of the TFS Transformation Plan. For each Operations Firefighter recruitment process, TFS receives upwards of 1,000 applications from fully qualified candidates.

TFS is a client of the City's People & Equity division, with all recruitment stages being overseen and managed by People & Equity Recruitment specialists.

There are four recruitment process stages, prior to job offers being made:

Stage 1: Screening of Applicants

All candidate resumes are screened, for both minimum pre-requisite job qualifications and asset qualifications, using a predetermined selection matrix. This matrix awards points to candidates for skills such as languages spoken, demonstrated commitment to volunteerism and community engagement, customer service experience, as well as for mechanical aptitude, previous military service, and fitness experience such as being active in sport and experience working in a fitness training environment.

This matrix was updated in 2016, with the most significant change being the elimination of points and preference for previous experience as a volunteer or career firefighter. This was eliminated to avoid disadvantaging Toronto applicants who would not be able to work for a volunteer service while residing in the City of Toronto.

Stage 2: Verification of Required Documents

The certificates and documents, submitted by the candidate, are verified for accuracy and validity.

Stage 3: Interview

All qualified candidates are ranked based on their score from the screening matrix (from Stage 1). TFS determines the number of candidates to be interviewed for the given recruitment process and selects the highest scoring candidates to fill the required number of interviews.

In 2017, following consultation with City Legal, TFS created a special program that ensures that fully qualified applicants, who identify as members of equity-deserving groups, and/or who are Toronto residents, are also invited to the interview stage.

Any fully qualified applicant, who identifies as being a member of an equity-deserving group (including Indigenous community members, Black residents, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, Women, and Persons with disabilities), or who are a Toronto resident, are invited to the interview stage, in addition to those who have already screened in via the selection matrix.

This ensures all fully qualified applicants that are Toronto Residents, and/or members of equity-deserving groups are given the opportunity to proceed to the interview stage. As all TCHC residents are Toronto Residents, they are already included in this special program.

Most recently, in 2022, TFS made additional changes to the composition of the interview panel to improve representation. The panels are made up of three staff, of which at least two are members of equity - deserving groups.

Stage 4: Conditional Job Offer

All candidates who are successful in the interview stage are then provided with conditional job offers. These conditional job offers require the successful clearance of several mandatory screenings including a medical screening conducted through the TFS Medical Office, as well as background and reference checks.

Those who successfully satisfy those requirements are then offered jobs and commence their employment as Recruit Firefighters.

Recruit Firefighters must successfully complete an 18-week, fully paid, recruit training program at the Toronto Fire Academy, before being assigned to a fire station in Toronto.

Community Outreach

Since 2016, TFS has been working proactively to expand the diversity of its complement. As part of the 2023 budget process, Council approved the reinstatement of the TFS Recruitment and Community Outreach Team. This team was previously eliminated in 2012, in response to budget reductions. This team attends community events and promotes TFS careers to Toronto residents, focusing on under-represented communities and equity-deserving groups.

The unit attended 60 events throughout the city in 2023 and has already surpassed this number of attendances to date in 2024.

Pathways to TFS Careers

Building and sustaining a thriving fire service, that is representative of Toronto's diversity, is critically important to TFS. The changes outlined above to the hiring process, including removing expiry dates from some of the stages of the CTS program, and the special program introduced into the interview process support applicants, including TCHC residents pursuing a career with TFS have resulted in industry-leading self-reported diversity within TFS recruit classes. In addition to the process changes, TFS staff have worked closely with TCHC to identify new opportunities for both organizations to support and prioritize TCHC residents wishing to pursue a career with TFS. These have been organized into three separate categories outlined below.

1. Raising Awareness of Careers in the Fire Service

Having a greater presence in the TCHC communities, through events and job fairs, increases TFS visibility and allows for dialogue about career opportunities within the fire service. This increased presence will also serve to correct any misconceptions about careers in the fire service that might be holding someone back from taking their next steps.

TFS' Recruitment and Community Outreach unit is actively working with TCHC on this initiative, with eight events, as of June 8th, and another eight already in the planning stages from June to September. As of June 8th, 12% of the recruitment and outreach events attended have been targeted for TCHC residents.

2. Hands-on Experience

The second step on the pathway is providing hands-on experience opportunities for TCHC residents. This can help solidify the career option and give prospective applicants a chance to see what the career is all about before taking the step to pursue the qualifications. Both TFS and TCHC have worked to build programs to support this.

A Day in the Life

Partnering with TCHC, TFS will be hosting a "day in the life" event at the Toronto Fire Academy for TCHC Youthworx program participants, this summer. Youth will have the opportunity to tour the Toronto Fire Academy, meet with Firefighters, Inspectors, Educators, Dispatchers and Mechanics, try their hand at a job skill, and watch live fire demonstrations. The intent is to provide a more experiential opportunity for TCHC residents, to enhance the understanding of prospective applicants before they pursue the minimum qualifications.

Fire and Life Safety Internship

TCHC's Fire and Life Safety unit has created three internship positions, open to TCHC residents, where they will have the opportunity to learn about data analytics for fire and life safety, and experience field work with the technicians at TCHC properties. These paid internships operate from May to the end of July 2024.

3. Financial and Wraparound Supports- A New Career Readiness Program

The cost of achieving the mandatory pre-requisite education and training required to apply for a career as a firefighter can be between \$10,000-20,000, which includes the educational requirements, Class "DZ" driver's license, and candidate testing.

In consultation with TFS, TCHC is currently developing a career-readiness program specifically for TCHC tenants, to provide financial and wraparound supports to succeed in becoming TFS operations firefighters. This program will operate within the TCHC Community Economic Development Team that works to create and facilitate economic opportunities for tenants. The proposed program will provide approximately 90 interested TCHC tenants with mentorship opportunities, hands-on experience, and other capacity-building activities. In addition to the wrap around supports, approximately 20 TCHC tenants will receive partial funding to support their pursuit of the required certifications. Together, these supports will ensure TCHC tenants can complete the required certifications and pre-requisites to be successful in a career in the fire service. To see this program realized, additional funding will need to be requested through the 2025 budget process by TCHC.

Additional Considerations

TFS is not able to adjust the pre-requisite requirements for Operations Firefighter, as NFPA 1001 is a provincially legislated requirement for all firefighters in the Province of Ontario. TFS does not have the capacity to offer this training in house, nor would it be possible for TFS to both train and certify prospective applicants.

Next Steps

TFS and TCHC will continue to collaborate on new opportunities to support TCHC residents in their consideration of careers with the fire service and the pathways that are available to them to pursue it.

Over the coming months, TCHC will continue to build out the process and logistics for this program, in consultation with TFS. Subject to the required funding being approved through the 2025 budget process, the first group of tenants will be identified for the new program.

CONTACT

Jim Jessop, Deputy Fire Chief, Toronto Fire Services, Jim.Jessop@toronto.ca

Sean Baird, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Community Housing Corporation
Sean.Baird@torontohousing.ca

SIGNATURE

Matthew Pegg
Fire Chief and General Manager
Fire Services

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Fire Services Careers and mandatory job qualifications